

Principles of Adult Learning

Effective VISTA trainings incorporate principles of adult learning. Adults are typically:

- Autonomous and self-directed
- Goal oriented
- Relevancy oriented
- Practical, focusing on aspects that are useful to them

Adults also have accumulated life experiences and knowledge, which deserve respect.

VISTA training strives to be consistent with the principles of adult learning. These principles, firmly established among those who provide adult education, have a tremendous impact on the effectiveness of a training. For example, if a trainer is not sensitive to the factors that contribute to learning — such as the need to stand up and move around at regular intervals — the trainer sends the message that the training process is rigid and one-sided. Trainees will react with negative feelings about the trainer or the training itself and may disengage from the learning process.

Training that embraces the principles of adult learning is likely to succeed. On a practical level, this means:

1. Incorporating input from trainees to establish the objectives for a particular training event.
2. Providing a self-assessment exercise in which trainees are encouraged to identify gaps between what they know and what they need to know.
3. Drawing on the knowledge, skills, and cultural background of the trainees to shape and enhance the overall direction of training.
4. Clearly stating training objectives at the beginning of an event or session and providing opportunities for revision of these before and during the session.
5. Incorporating input from trainees for sequencing learning activities and “checking in” frequently during the training to see if needs are being met.
6. Planning training activities that emphasize learning by doing: simulation exercises, role playing, case problems, and other problem-solving activities.
7. Planning training that takes into account different learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.
8. Establishing a learning climate in which trainees feel comfortable participating.

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9. Selecting a physical environment that is conducive to learning; for example, arranging seating so that participants can communicate with each other easily.
10. Including evaluation and feedback on the trainees' progress in acquiring the needed competencies.
11. Providing the opportunity for evaluation and feedback on the trainer's skill and overall training design.